

# **SAYING HELLO TO THE LUNATIC MEN: A CRITICAL READING OF 'LOVE IS LOST'**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Pierrot the clown is a recurring figure in David Bowie's oeuvre. In this article we examine Bowie's use of Pierrot in his self-directed homemade video for the single release of 'Love Is Lost' (2013). The article demonstrates how an understanding of Pierrot (and all he represents), as well as Bowie's engagement with avant-garde Jewish composers and artists, is vital to interpreting 'Love is Lost'. We provide a reading of Bowie's use of Pierrot as an avatar for everyman, for creativity and for the struggles over identities.

**KEYWORDS: Bowie; Pierrot; Avant-Garde; 'Love Is Lost'; Reich; 'Clapping Music.'**

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### **Introduction**

Pierrot, the sad and sometimes insolent clown is a recurring and highly significant figure in David Bowie's creative work (see Hawkins, 2009; Carpenter, 2012; Waldrep, 2015). This includes Bowie's performances in and songwriting for the Lindsay Kemp production of *Pierrot in Turquoise* (1967), his dressing as Pierrot in a performance of *The Man Who Sold the World* (with the late Klaus Nomi) (Hawkins, 2009: p. 61), his extensive use of the clown in promoting the album *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps* (1980), and his numerous references to Pierrot in media interviews.<sup>1</sup> In previous research (see Dillane *et al*, 2015), we have examined Bowie's performance as Pierrot in the promotional video for *Ashes to Ashes* (1980). Taking as our starting point that Bowie's use of Pierrot is as important as his many other creations,<sup>2</sup> we investigate the Bowie/Pierrot connection further with reference to his self-directed homemade video for the single release of *Love Is Lost* (2013).

We begin by discussing the history and cultural significance of Pierrot and Bowie's life-long connections with the clown. We then outline the history of *Love is Lost*. A critical reading of the single release version of the song and its accompanying video is then presented. As someone heavily influenced by and as a proponent of avant-garde ideas, Bowie's typically multi-layered and semiotically rich creative outputs are examples par excellence of texts which have the clear potential to be polysemic (see for example, analyses of Bowie's videos for *Ashes to Ashes* by Perrins (2015) and *Where Are We Now?* by Naiman (2015)). His broad palette of influences - as much as his capacity to appropriate, to 'cut-up', 'mash-up' and to act as trickster, and obfuscate – confront researchers and others with many interpretative challenges and can, we hold, best be engaged with through adopting a hermeneutic approach (see Kinsella, 2006). In analysing both the song and the video, we draw upon a mixture of research methods from Ethnomusicology and the Sociology of Media.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, our exegesis is grounded in a thorough familiarity with Bowie's creative outputs as well as with the many influences which shaped his thinking and creativity.

In dissecting *Love Is Lost*, our close reading of the song and video will concentrate on several critical themes, including his interest in Jewish artists and ideas, in composers Arnold Schoenberg and Steve Reich in particular, and in his theatricalised approach to the Pierrot figure. *Love is Lost*, as we will discuss later, opens with sounds of vigorous hand-clapping in direct acknowledgment of Reich's *Clapping Music* (1972). We conclude by re-asserting the importance of musical drama and of the Pierrot figure not just in terms of understanding *Love is Lost*, but also in terms of the clown's role in Bowie's overall career.

## **Pierrot And Bowie**

In exploring the Bowie-Pierrot nexus we are particularly interested in early twentieth century manifestations of Pierrot and specifically the Pierrot found in Arnold Schoenberg's expressionist piece *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912). As we have previously argued, (Dillane *et al* 2015) this is an era with which Bowie was quite familiar, as a result of his personal research into facets of German culture and politics during his time spent in Berlin. We also discuss Bowie's role in *Pierrot in Turquoise*, which we hold was seminal in shaping Bowie from the outset, placing the dramatic arts right at the centre of his expressivity and installing Pierrot as a recurring theme or leitmotif across his career. The emergence of one particular type of Pierrot - the so-called 'Seaside Pierrots' – in the early twentieth century is of particular relevance when examining Bowie's video for *Love is Lost*. In this guise Pierrot was typically dressed in black and wearing a conical hat that served to warn audiences that a murder or robbery was about to take place.

## **Earlier Pierrots**

While Pierrot-type characters occur in various forms and guises across four centuries of European drama, it is generally agreed that Pierrot cohered into a recognizable figure from the *commedia dell'arte* in sixteenth-century Italy, emerging in dramatic forms across the continent, from Italy to Spain, France to England and beyond (see Storey, 1978). The hallmark of Commedia, an improvised dramatic form, was a self-conscious theatricality, full of exaggeration and artifice. This early representation of Pierrot, Pierre or 'Little Peter' was in the form of a quick and capricious buffoon who, over time, began to take on greater complexity and vulnerability during the eighteenth

century, a beautiful if often lost soul, or sometimes a vessel for multiple characters (Storey, 1978: 3). This was the period in which Pierrot's Commedia white costume and white-faced appearance became firmly established (Kurth, 2010). Pierrot gradually took on a decidedly more dandified persona amongst the nineteenth-century Romantics (Hawkins, 2009). In England, Pierrot was part of Harlequinade — a slapstick version of the Commedia featuring Harlequin and Pierrot as the two principal figures. Pierrot the clown was, for many, most associated with pantomime form. A young Bowie encountered such dramatic forms, including mime, in his training with choreographer Lindsay Kemp in the late sixties, and soon embodied them, playing the role of Cloud in *Pierrot in Turquoise* in 1967 (see Carpenter, 2010).

However, before discussing that formative experience for Bowie, it is also worth considering how the Pierrot character developed new facets and greater psychological depth at the turn of the twentieth century. This Pierrot (including the 'Seaside Pierrot') took on a darker side, exerting a huge influence on Western modernism, particularly between 1890 and 1930. Many avant-garde writers, painters and composers mobilized this darker version in their works, particularly those from the Expressionist cadre. In light of this, perhaps it is not surprising that in his own era, Bowie would also turn to the powerful figure of Pierrot to energize his creative output.

As we have noted previously, (see Dillane *et al* 2015), one canonical work from that era is the melodrama by the composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) entitled *Pierrot Lunaire*, which premiered in Berlin's Choralion-Saal in 1912. This *Pierrot of the Moon* is in contrast to its sunny *commedia dell'arte* progenitors as Schoenberg crafted 'a darker and more sinister Pierrot' for that time (Linder, 2012).

This work, with its new, taut atonal sounds, dramatic and textured ensemble, and varied vocal techniques explored new depths in the psyche, deploying parody and ironic detachment to marshal excessive expressionistic tendencies. Schoenberg was seen as a transformative figure in the music world (Sandford, 1996), someone who moved away from the excesses of nineteenth-century Romanticism, with its lush orchestration and sentimentality, and into, at least in this piece, the macabre, which is carefully and deliberately expressed at a distance by the composer (Carpenter, 2010).

Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, based on a series of poems by Albert Giraud (1860–1929), was first published in 1884, and features a complex figure shifting between hero and fool (Marsh, 2007; Richter, 2001). In this setting, Schoenberg presents Pierrot as the centrepiece of a melodrama, with high art as cabaret. Within its taut and dramatic soundscape, song and speech blur, male roles are sung by a woman and the subject position vacillates between first and third person. Such tricks are familiar in the Bowie oeuvre (see, for example, the video for Bowie's *Boys Keep Swinging* (1979) in of which he makes extensive use of 'drag' as a performance device.)

It is likely that Schoenberg's *Pierrot* struck a chord with Bowie, not least because of the character's depraved, moonstruck delirium and his complex psyche, all supremely controlled in this tightly woven, avant-garde musical form (see Carpenter, 2010). As Murray has pointed out, Bowie's own paintings and drawings seemed to be specifically influenced by *Die Brücke*, a key German Expressionist group with which Schoenberg had ties (Murray, 2013). It is probable that Bowie would have studied Expressionist painters as a young man; a self-portrait of Bowie from around 1980 bears striking resemblance to a self-portrait by Schoenberg. Although it is possible

that Bowie may have backdated his interest in Expressionism, it is worth noting that in an interview with *Uncut* magazine focused on Berlin, Bowie referred to:

“...discovering Expressionism since my teenage years I had obsessed on the angst ridden, emotional work of the expressionists, both artists and film makers, and Berlin had been their spiritual home. This was the nub of Die Brücke movement, Max Reinhardt, Brecht and where *Metropolis* and *Caligari* had originated. It was an art form that mirrored life not by event but by mood. This was where I felt my work was going” (Bowie in Dalton and Hughes, 2001).

His early focus on the angst and emotional aspects of (German) Expressionism would serve as an important hallmark for his various personae, most notably Pierrot. *Pierrot in Turquoise or, The Looking Glass Murders* was a theatre creation of British choreographer, actor and mime artist, Lindsay Kemp, who was a very influential figure in Bowie's early career. Starring alongside Kemp as Pierrot, Bowie played the character of Cloud and composed and performed the musical numbers for the show, which debuted in Oxford in December 1967, including 'Threepenny Pierrot', 'Columbine', and 'The Mirror'. The production was subsequently broadcast in 1970, having been recorded by Scottish television in 1969.

As Cloud and song performer, Bowie played the roles of troubadour and narrator thus framing a device for the action, supplementing the mime and offering commentary on the emotional state of the characters and audience. The plot was simple: Pierrot attempts to win the love of Columbine, but when she 'betrays' him with Harlequin, he murders her (hence 'The Looking Glass Murders'). Even though Bowie did not play Pierrot, his exposure to the character meant that Pierrot was deeply implicated in Bowie's own biography, particularly as evidenced by his

professional and personal relationships with the cast and crew of *Pierrot in Turquoise*. Bowie's training and work with Kemp would foreshadow his later use of Pierrot. Natasha Korniloff created costumes for Kemp's company and was also, for a time, Bowie's lover. Two decades later Bowie would ask her to design and create costumes for his 1978 tour and, more specifically, to make him the blue Pierrot costume used for the promotional materials for *Scary Monsters*.

As a stock character with historical longevity and cultural capital, Pierrot was the consummate 'rockstar' of each era in which this character found himself, from early commedia dell'arte right through to the twentieth century, where many actors and mime artists literally became Pierrot heroes as a result of their commanding portrayals of the character. Bowie simply did the same by taking on this celebrated form and by copper-fastening the connection between mime (with its posing and exaggeration) and rock 'n' roll performance. Pierrot may have been a lovelorn fool but the fool is paradigm for the artist; one who takes risks as Schoenberg did and as Bowie himself did in *Ashes to Ashes* and throughout his career.

### **Sounds And Visions: *Love Is Lost* – A Brief History**

In 2013 Bowie offered three clues as to what the song *Love Is Lost* might be about. These were the words: 'Hostage', 'Transference' and 'Identity' (Moody, 2013). In addition to possible DJ or fan re-mixes, there are four official versions of the song. Composed by Bowie, and appearing initially as a track (duration 3'54') on *The Next Day* album (2013), the song was remixed as *Love is Lost (Hello Steve Reich Mix for the DFA)* by James Murphy<sup>4</sup> of LCD Soundsystem. An edited version of the latter was released as a single to promote the deluxe edition of *The Next Day*. It is also



featured in the soundtrack of the musical, *Lazarus*, co-written by Bowie and the Irish playwright Enda Walsh.

Murphy's remix has a number of notable features. As well as sampling the treated piano line by Roy Brittan from *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), his elongated production at 10'24' represents a stripped down but stretched version of the original song. Perhaps the most striking feature of Murphy's remix was his decision to recreate<sup>5</sup> samples from Steve Reich's *Clapping Music* (1972). Murphy's explicit acknowledgement of Reich's work, underscores an earlier set of connections between the avant-garde composer and Bowie. They had interacted in the 1970s and, as recently as 2010, Bowie stated that he was currently listening to a Reich composition – *Different Trains 1: America - Before The War*, which he described as: 'One of the late 20th century's most affecting works. I love the use of speech as a source for melody. But it's so much more than a concept, it's also impossibly moving' (Bowie, 2010).

Two official videos were created to promote the song. The first video was directed by Bowie himself, the second by Barnaby Roper. Roper's video intended for the longer version of the remixed song, commences with a close up shot of 8 pairs of clapping hands. Computer generated wireframe figures eventually reveal a couple engaged in lovemaking only to eventually disintegrate and fall away from one another. Significantly, two ghostlike figures of Bowie as Pierrot hover briefly in the background. The idea to include Pierrot from the video for *Ashes to Ashes* came from Roper<sup>6</sup> and not from Bowie (for a detailed examination of the *Ashes to Ashes* video, see Dillane *et al* 2015; Waldrep, 2015) but was intended as a nod to his earlier work.

The shorter video used to promote the single edit release of *Love is Lost* was directed by David Bowie. Shot over one weekend in his Manhattan office, with assistance from his colleagues Jimmy King and Coco Schwab, the video cost just 12.99\$ (the price of a memory stick) to make (DavidBowie.com (2013)). It received its first public viewing at the 2013 Barclaycard Mercury Awards on October 30 and was then released on Halloween. While much press commentary focused on the apparent novelty of Bowie's DIY efforts as a video-maker and the lack of a big production budget, much less attention was paid to Bowie's decision to cast two wooden puppets as the stars of the film. The wooden versions of Pierrot and Thin White Duke were created for Bowie at an estimated cost of 28,000\$ by the Jim Henson Creature Shop, for an earlier (aborted) video for the song *The Pretty Things Are Going To Hell* (1999). In the storyboard for that abandoned video (and foreshadowing much of Bowie's video work for *The Next Day* and *Black Star*) the 'current' Bowie would encounter four of his personae (Pierrot; Ziggy Stardust; The Man Who Fell To Earth and The Thin White Duke). The project was eventually shelved and Bowie would later claim in an on-line Q&A with fans that it was because '...we found that the puppets ended up looking like puppets.'

### **Analysis Of The Song**

It is important to point out from the outset that our musical analysis of *Love is Lost* acknowledges the fact that although approved ultimately by Bowie, the song was fashioned by James Murphy<sup>7</sup>, musician, producer, songwriter and founder of the project, LCD Soundsystem. In terms of the *Hello Steve Reich* mix, Murphy's role

needs to be understood in the following ways. For the purposes of this study, we primarily view Murphy through the lens of tool and technology directed by Bowie. As has been documented elsewhere (see Devereux *et al* 2015), Bowie used different creative techniques, including Burroughs' 'cut up' technique, to create song lyrics. Murphy's role may be read as an extension of that creative technique as adopted and adapted by Bowie, and as an extension of other technological interventions implemented by Bowie. Second, as someone who regularly collaborated with great producers and other musical visionaries (such as Brian Eno, Tony Visconti and Nile Rogers), Bowie's inclusion of Murphy into his creative fold was part of his penchant for being inspired by and adapting the sounds of avant-garde artists (see Dillane *et al*, 2015). As we have already noted, prior to the recording of this edit, a professional relationship had already developed between Bowie and Murphy. As a cutting-edge DJ working in the live scene and in other recording capacities (most notably as LCD Soundsystem), Murphy's presence within the Bowie soundscape may be understood as a part of the artist's desire to keep his music fresh and relevant. The fact that Bowie embraced a longer version of Murphy's mix and then pared it down to less than five minutes, to which he then created a video, is testament to the efficacy of this creative intervention.

### **Tracking The Edit**

Murphy's edit of *Love is Lost* lasts 4 min 8 seconds. It opens with live applause, rather random but seemingly appreciative and reminiscent of the response someone might get at the start or the end of a piece of theatre or a more intimate gig or cabaret; this feels like a sparsely attended affair. The clapping, featuring anywhere from five or more pairs of hands, gradually morphs into something with a more regularized

pulse. It takes a while for this pulse to establish itself, not simply because the transition from random to structured is so gradual, but also because of a pull and a tension in the rhythm itself. It is challenging to find the down beat. Even when the clapping texture thickens out with rhythms, punctuated by different clapping lines, it is not until the synthesizer enters that it becomes apparent where in the 4/4 beat of the song the downbeats reside. Also here, there is a decided 3 against 2 feel, creating a kind of tension and almost metric dissonance.

The inspiration for the clapping is found in the subtitle of the mix, *Hello Steve Reich*. In 1972, the celebrated American composer and minimalist Steve Reich composed a simple but highly effective piece of music for two people entitled *Clapping Music*. The entire structure of the composition, based on one 12/8 measure, is clapped by both people in unison and repeated eight times initially, at which point, the second person staggers their entry by an eighth note (or quaver).

**[Fig 1. The ‘Clapping Music’ figuration and sample permutation to be placed here]**

**Figure 1** The *Clapping Music* figuration and sample permutation.

This iteration goes through a cycle of eight repetitions until the second person staggers their entry by another eighth note duration, and so on, until the entire piece is cycled through and the two people or clapping voices come back into unison. Crucially it is the syncopated characteristic of the original 12/8 measure, with its particular grouping of notes and silences, which produces wonderful variety in the rhythms. Each iteration of the cycle comprises a different characteristic. In his edit,

Murphy did not sample Reich's 12/8 figure. Rather he recorded his own sample in 2013, maintaining many of the rhythmic characteristics and syncopated features of the original figure, including a sense of three against two.

**[Fig 2. Representation of the 3 against 2 pulsation in 'Love is Lost' clapping figure to be placed here]**

**Figure 2** Representation of the 3 against 2 pulsation in *Love is Lost* clapping figure.

A long-time admirer of the composer so revered as an avant-garde icon and a giant in the minimalist scene as well as in New York, Bowie was undoubtedly inspired by Murphy to adapt Reich's ideas. As we have noted earlier, Reich, for his part, was aware of Bowie's admiration for his work, and that this version of *Love is Lost* adapted elements of *Clapping Music*. The adaptation of a 'strict canon', the staggered entries and exits of a fixed piece of material, has more than musical implications. It is symbolic too, in terms of the concept of cycles, recycling materials, and turning back to the past to inform the present. Such an idea plays out in many ways as the song progresses, particularly in the inclusion of the opening riff from *Ashes to Ashes*, something that does not feature in the original album version of the song (see Dillane et al 2015 for a musicological analysis of *Ashes to Ashes*). It's a bold gesture, immediately creating a sonic link to that iconic Bowie song from 1980. The opening synthesizer sounds of Murphy's mix make all the more sense as a reference to the New Romantics and to synthesized music in a contemporary context, Murphy's own lingua franca.

Yet, the inclusion of the riff from *Ashes to Ashes* is more than just effective sampling. It is revealed that it is in the harmonic structure of 'Love is Lost',

especially in the opening section, that the sonic DNA of *Ashes to Ashes* is nested. This, it seems, is also what Murphy is responding to in his interpretation of the song. Compared with the original version of *Asj*, which has a richer more layered harmonic texturing, Murphy's version is more stripped back, although the harmonic architecture is still there in the shadow of *Ashes to Ashes*. The opening lines of the song in Murphy's mix follow Bowie's composition faithfully, starting on a Bb minor chord, moving down in the base to Ab (over which is held the Bb minor chord) and then down to a Gb major chord. The opening measures of *Ashes to Ashes* does almost exactly the same, starting on a Bb minor chord, moving down to an Ab major and then to Eb minor (which is closely related to Gb major as its relative minor, and which arguably operates in much the same way as part of a downward, minor harmonic phrase). The key is therefore exactly the same in both songs (at least in these parts of the song). All that has really changed is a kind of elongation of the initial Bb minor chord in *Love is Lost*; it lasts longer and doesn't move away as fast as it does in *Ashes to Ashes*. Interestingly, *Ashes to Ashes* was recorded at around 120 bpm, whereas 'Love is Lost' is at 100 bpm – in other words, considerably slower, more measured, perhaps an acknowledgment of the passing of time, the growing older, the retrospection.

**[Figure 3. Opening words and chords of the first verse of 'Love is Lost' to be placed here]**

**Figure 3** Opening words and chords of the first verse of *Love is Lost*.

The only place where the downward, Bb minor to Ab to Gb figuration is found in its purest form in the original *Ashes to Ashes* is during the underpinning of the line, ‘Strung out on heaven’s high, hitting an all-time low’, where it follows the mirror image of this progression, moving from Gb, to Ab to Bb minor. This is significant in that it alludes to the idea of looking back and looking into the mirror. However, it also points to the use of other mirroring effects, the most obvious of which is found in the chorus ‘Love is Lost, Lost is Love’. This is essentially a palindrome.

Yet it is not merely the words that warrant attention. The melodic motif to which these words are set is also significant. The figure of ‘Love is lost’ moves from note three to one to one – Love (3) is (1) lost (1). The next part almost constitutes the answer within a palindrome figuration – Lost (1) is (3) love (should be 3 but is 1): Love is lost, lost is love, 3-1-1 I 1-3-1. In other words, there is a rupture – things are not reflected back in quite the same way (just as the face projections from the past don’t quite fit in the present). At the same time there is yet another layer of interpretation possible here around the imperfection of this half-palindrome. We read this as Bowie’s efforts to honour Reich’s music in his work. It is obvious that the clapping piece is the ostensible reference to Reich. However, in 1988, Reich wrote a highly celebrated piece constructed around voice samples from the spoken testimonies of Holocaust survivors.<sup>8</sup> Called *Different Trains*, it is quite uncanny to listen to movement’s one and three in particular and hear sonic connections between it and the way Bowie sings and intones ‘Love is Lost’ with its speech-song emphasis on descending minor thirds, the hallmark of the song. Given Bowie’s public acknowledgement of the first movement in 2010, we hold that this is not just coincidental.

Murphy, then, toys with all of these ideas, revving up from the initial applause, creating the beat, and then decelerating towards the midway point of the song, where the clapping reappears, rupturing the song, almost like a dream (nightmare) of the past – but when the beat returns with the strong *Ashes to Ashes* referent, the power of the song reaches its apex. This, in turn, perhaps reminds us that the central character here is Pierrot. Just as in *Ashes to Ashes* where, according to Bowie, the bulldozer symbolized ‘oncoming violence’ (see Dillane *et al* 2015), in *Love is Lost*, Pierrot is a figure surrounded by malevolence. To allude to *Ashes to Ashes* sonically is also finally to bring about the demise of this character, as is manifest in Bowie’s DIY video.

### **‘Look into my eyes...’**

So how can Bowie’s video *Love is Lost* be deciphered? Is it a confession, a hallucination, an expurgation of guilt, a dark dream sequence or a Gothic nightmare? Is it about the death of first love at the age of 22? While our hermeneutic approach<sup>9</sup> acknowledges that texts and their possible meanings/readings are never fully closed or complete, we also recognize that it is fruitful to scrutinise the video’s initial encoding and the likely influences on its creator carefully. Its central character is presented to us dressed in funereal black, complete with conical hat. He is an amalgamation of Pierrot and Bowie. The dominant camera language employed is that of the close-up shot with a noticeable use of extreme close-ups of eyes and hands.

As well as referencing Bowie’s personae or masks (represented through The Thin White Duke and the two Pierrot puppets), the video contains a fleeting glimpse



of the *Heroes* album cover that was also used as the basis of *The Next Day* artwork. The video also makes an explicit reference to the song *Ashes to Ashes* (1980) – itself a requiem - by tying together shots of the ‘Ashes’ era Pierrot dressed in a silver clown’s costume, when the listener hears the signature keyboard sample from that song. Bowie’s practice of double-stacking references to past selves was also in evidence on the sleeve design for *Scary Monsters*. On that album cover we see Pierrot re-enacting the Sukita ‘Heroes’ pose, complete with cigarette in hand.

Bowie’s self-made video repeats a technique used by Tony Oursler in the video for *Where Are We Now?* (2013). In that video, Bowie’s face is superimposed on a mannequin. We would suggest that both videos are reminiscent of the final short play by Samuel Beckett, *What, Where* (1983), which relies on the lit faces of four characters who were reputed to be based on Russian clowns. As with Bowie, Beckett was no stranger to using clowns to stress the binary relationship between comedy and tragedy and the absurdities of human existence. Bowie’s admiration for another Irish artist, painter Jack B. Yeats, is also worth noting at this juncture. In his latter phase as an Expressionist painter, Yeats repeatedly painted clowns and circuses as a way of examining the role of the artist in society and of exploring themes such as the Holocaust and mass migration of people following World War 2 (Devereux, 2017).

The video can be read as a narrative of guilt, arising from a murder or a killing. In line with the over-arching themes of *The Next Day* (2013), this may refer to death,<sup>10</sup> killing, violence or murder in general, (e.g. ‘I’d Rather Be High’) or more specifically Bowie’s efforts to kill off his past personae. It may also refer to Pierrot’s murder of Columbine and, in fact, rehearses a number of key themes from *Pierrot in*

*Turquoise, or The Looking Glass Murders* (1967). Furthermore, in *Lazarus the Musical, Love is Lost* is set to a murder by the character Valentine. The opening shots rehearse a scene from *Macbeth* (Lady Macbeth's 'Out damned spot...') and witness Bowie washing his (clean) hands. These actions are later repeated and may be read as a signifier of guilt or distress. The video's final scenes show the tap still running; while Bowie's hands are no longer visible, there is a suggestion that the underlying drive to wash away guilt has not been realised. The act of hand-washing is a well-known tell-tale sign of lying.

The focus on guilt and distress is also evident in the decision to use extreme close-ups of eyes and faces. While facial expressions are an obvious way to convey feelings, the zooming in on eyes is even more important, a reminder of Cicero's assertion that the eyes are the window to the soul<sup>11</sup>. Given Bowie's close familiarity with *Pierrot in Turquoise*, it is also important to recall that in the 1967 mime, Pierrot, having murdered Columbine, stabs Harlequin in the eye.

As much as eyes, images of hands play a crucial role. Hand-clapping by just two pairs of hands (one human and the other inanimate) not only pays homage to the original Steve Reich (1972) composition, but also serves to suggest guilt in the video through anxiety, distress and realization. All three characters hold a hand to their individual faces to depict the gravity of what has happened. Pierrot's hand tapping seems to suggest nervous anticipation – of either what he is about to do or the inevitable discovery of what he has already done. Hands, of course, are usually implicated in committing murder. Similarly, facial expressions are inherent in Bowie's work, ranging from anxiety and fear (Pierrot/Bowie) to those of foreboding

(Bowie and The Thin White Duke). Surveillance is suggested through the act of Bowie and The Thin White Duke watching over Pierrot/Bowie at various points in the video. As Bowie watches from a distance in the door-frame of the bathroom, The Thin White Duke gazes from down the corridor looking over Pierrot/Bowie's shoulder.

Death as theme is signified through the use of darkness, through the repeated use of spinning skeletal shapes and, most glaringly, through the presentation of the Pierrot/Bowie figure. Dressed in black, the Pierrot/Bowie figure's face is whitened, corpse-like, framed by a black conical hat. In this way, the styling of the Pierrot/Bowie figure resurrects a version of Pierrot dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In France, Pierrot's dark side was brought to the fore in a number of plays and mimes. Instead of his usual colourful clown costumes, he was presented in black clothes in order to signal his darker side. Similarly, in the Victorian era, English Seaside Pierrots, when robed this way, were used in short dramas or sketches concerning murder or robbery. Allowing for variations within individual plays and mimes, it would be Pierrot's jealousy of Columbine and Harlequin's lustful affair that led him to murder his lover and to inflict serious injury on Harlequin.

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

As is common in Bowie songs, *Love is Lost* was interpreted in many ways by fans and critics on its initial release and speculation presumably grew with the release of Bowie's DIY video on Halloween 2013. The lyrics' reference to age and voice was interpreted by some as being about the younger Bowie who had broken up with his

first real love, Hermione Farthingdale (whose appearance in *Song of Norway* was also referenced on Bowie's t-shirt in the video for *Where Are We Now?* (2013)) and had released *Space Oddity* at the age of 22. The song's lyrics also made allusions to other themes evident on *The Next Day* such as immigration, war/killing and madness.

Mindful of the three clues, offered up by Bowie as to what the song might possibly be about ('Hostage'; 'Identity' and 'Transference') (Moody, 2013), we interpret this song and its accompanying video as complex and multi-layered, and thus open to multiple readings. Our hermeneutic approach, however, demonstrates how an understanding of Pierrot, as well as Bowie's engagement with Jewish avant-garde composers, is the key to understanding *Love is Lost*.

While in the past, Bowie 'performed' as Pierrot, most notably in the video for *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), in *Love is Lost* (2013), something of greater significance occurs. Bowie's use of personae to ventriloquize is nothing new. However, his use of Pierrot (including the merging of Bowie and Pierrot) in *Love is Lost* (2013), with its rehearsal of the key elements of the 'Pierrot in Turquoise' storyline, suggests that the song is about killing, murder, violence, and guilt. Is Bowie killing off his earlier personae? By positioning Pierrot and a merged Pierrot/Bowie centre-stage, the video allows the 'real' Bowie to sing the truth about his pasts. The Lunatic Men (Pierrot, The Thin White Duke) allow for secrets to be unveiled and purged.

Finally, we offer up one final layer to our reading of *Love is Lost* (2013). The explicit reference to Steve Reich, we suggest, extends beyond the acknowledgement of one artist by another. In many ways, as we've written

elsewhere, it again points to the importance of inspiration from the avant-garde that Bowie has long drawn upon, including Arnold Schoenberg (see Dillane et al 2015). Reich, like Schoenberg was Jewish and a reading of the song's lyrics, reveal interesting allusions to the kabbalah<sup>12</sup> (including references to the mystic number of 22, which has particular karmic properties; 'the darkest hour' before dawn, which is critical moment of enlightenment out of despair; and lunatic men which is often a metaphor for a prophet). Such references not only foreshadow Jewish and Gnostic referents in *Blackstar* (2016), but also, like the palindromic 'love is lost, lost is love', hark back to Bowie's interest in Jewish mysticism as evidenced in *Station to Station* (1976) (with its numerous occult allusions, and links to Aleister Crowley and Golden Dawn).<sup>13</sup> To hone in on any Jewish elements of Bowie's work is not an attempt to buy into the conspiracy theories in various online fora that Bowie was Jewish or connected to Jewishness through his half-brother Terry Burns. Rather it's to reflect on the intricate conflation of Pierrot with creativity and with Jewishness. Throughout his life, Bowie was particular drawn to Jewish artists, from Reich, to Schoenberg, and to Bob Dylan. In *Love is Lost*, Pierrot is Jewish, and by extension Bowie becomes Jewish in a metaphorical sense – an outsider, a transplanted alien, and a victim of murder. In the video, *The Thin White Duke*, holds a supine dying Pierrot a reference to the Madonna holding her murdered child, Jesus, King of the Jews. As well as alluding to the death of Pierrot, the death of the artist, the death of Christ, Bowie might well be referencing the genocide of the Jews during the Holocaust. Inevitably, in such a reading, the influence of the first part of Reich's *Different Trains* takes on even more poignant relevance.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, 'I'm Pierrot, I'm Everyman. What I'm doing is Theatre and only Theatre... What you see on stage isn't sinister, it's pure clown. I'm using my face as a canvas and trying to paint the truth of our time on it. The white face, the baggy pants – they're Pierrot, the eternal clown putting over the

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great sadness...' Bowie cited in Rook (1976) and 'What the music says may be serious, [...] but as a medium it should not be questioned, analysed or taken too seriously. I think it should be tarted up, made into a prostitute, a parody of itself. It should be the clown, the Pierrot medium. The music is the mask the message wears—music is the Pierrot and I, the performer, am the message' - Bowie as cited in Mendelssohn, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> These creations include Ziggy Stardust, the Thin White Duke, Halloween Jack, Major Tom and Aladdin Sane. For scholarly accounts of Bowie's changing personae see Leorne (2015); Lobalzo Wright (2015). See the introductory essay in Waldrep (2015) in particular.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of music video analysis see for example Vernallis (1998); Viñuela Suárez 2015) and Middleton (1990).

<sup>4</sup> The producer first worked with Bowie when the latter was recording backing vocals for the Arcade Fire song *Reflektor*. Murphy plays percussion on two tracks – *Sue (or In A Season of Crime)* and *Girl Loves Me* on Bowie's final album *Black Star* (2016).

<sup>5</sup> The recreated hand clapping in the remixed version features James Murphy, Matthew Thornley, Hisham Bharoocha and Jordan Hebert.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication from Barnaby Roper to Eoin Devereux.

<sup>7</sup> Citing influences ranging from The Fall to David Bowie, James Murphy is an electronic musician, singer, songwriter, DJ and record producer. He is best known musical project is LCD Soundsystem. Murphy has worked as a producer for a range of well-known acts including Arcade Fire. He contributed to David Bowie's last record *Black Star* (2015).

<sup>8</sup> Reich used a particular sampling technological process for many of his works. He transferred the voice recordings to a sampling keyboard and used the keyboards in performances, complete with notated score, rather than using a backing track.

<sup>9</sup> In doing so, we draw upon musicological and contextual analytical techniques and approaches from Middleton (1990), Shuker (2001), and Hawkins (2009), viewing both the mix and the original song as being assemblages replete with allusions to other art forms, full of deliberate historical and structural allusions and crafted with technical sophistication that becomes all the more apparent when read in tandem with the video. Our approach to video analysis concurs with Vernallis (1998, p.175) who sees the music video as a new composite text whereby "many of the meanings of music video lie in this give-and-take between sound and image". In other words, even when and where the visuals, music and lyrics work as independent mediums, once they appear in the format of a multimedia music video they are no longer individually autonomous, but rather they are influenced by each other (see Viñuela Suárez 2015).

<sup>10</sup> There are six specific references to death and dying in the song lyrics for *The Next Day* album. In addition to this, there are repeated references to violent acts.

<sup>11</sup> Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, Book 1.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Chris O'Leary's lengthy discussions of Kabbalah references in *Station to Station* and in other songs in <https://bowiesongs.wordpress.com>. For popular understanding of the importance of the number 22, see <http://www.ridingthebeast.com/numbers/nu22.php>

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**Fig 1. The 'Clapping Music' figuration and sample permutation**

12/8 time: 3 x 4 quarter notes where X is a clap and 0 a rest or silence

Iteration 1 (unison)

Person 1:        X X X 0            X X 0 X            0 X X 0 : ||

Person 2:        X X X 0            X X 0 X            0 X X 0 : ||

Iteration 2 (note **new** articulations in the texture due to the displacement)

Person 1:	X X X 0	X X 0 X	0 X X 0 :
Person 2:	- X X X	0 X X 0	X 0 X X 0 :

**Fig 2. Representation of the 3 against 2 pulsation in 'Love is Lost' clapping figure**

4/4 time: X = clap 0 = silence

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + |

XX 0X X0 XX | 0X X0 XX 0X...etc

Note: pattern is a triple figure of XX0 repeated, a 3 against 2 (or 4)

**Figure 3. Opening words and chords of the first verse of 'Love is Lost'**

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**Chord:** *Bb min*

**Lyric:** It's the darkest hour, you're twenty-two

**Chord:** *Bb min*

**Lyric:** The voice of youth, the hour of dread

**Chord:** *Ab maj suggested but really Ab bass under a Bb min chord – Bb min 7th*

**Lyric:** The darkest hour, and your voice is new

**Chord:** *Gb maj*

**Lyric:** Love is lost, lost is love